PALESTINE REFUGEES AND UNRWA

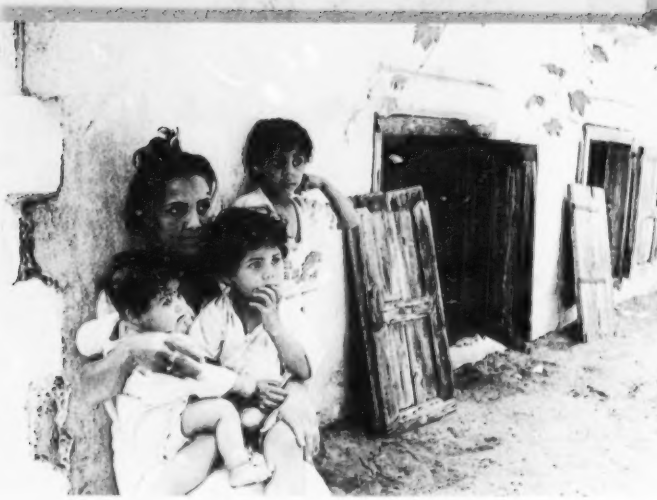
PALESTINE REFUGEES...

Who are they?

Some 750,000 Palestinians, mostly small landowners, farm workers and labourers, lost their homes and livelihoods in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. They fled from the territory which became the state of Israel to the neighbouring Arab countries, mainly to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. The 1967 war, resulting in the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the Golan Heights, led to the displacement of another 500,000 Palestinians. Today, mainly through natural population growth, the number of Palestine refugees registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) has reached over two million.

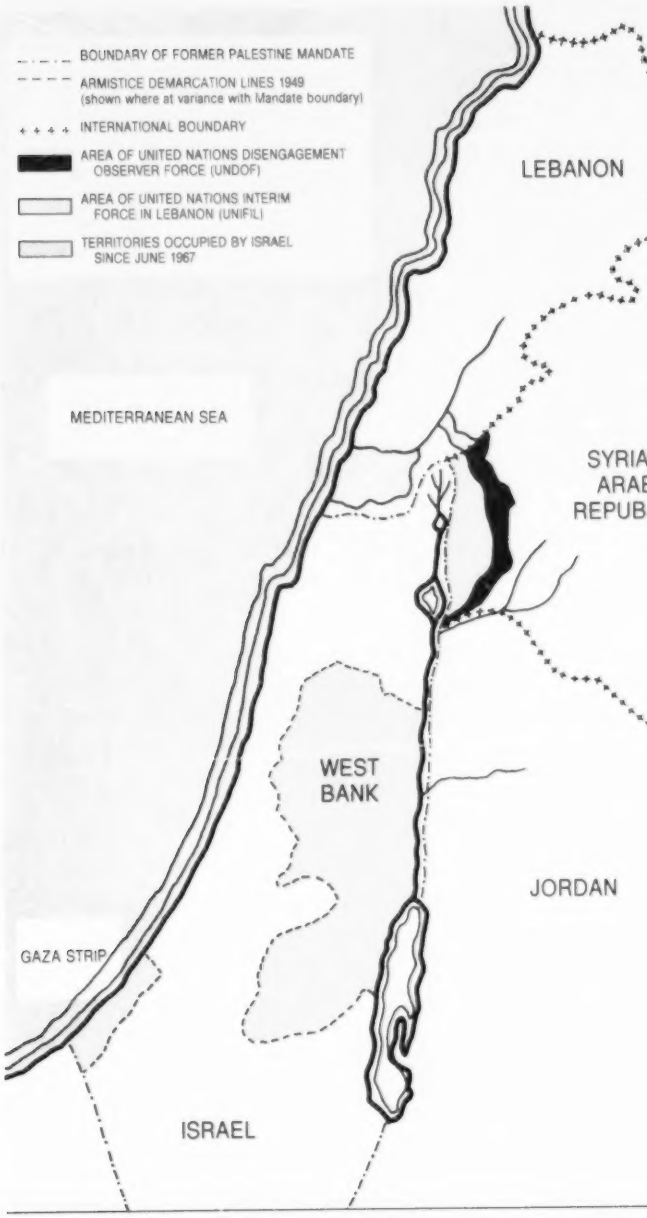
Where do they live?

One third of the refugees still live in concrete or prefabricated shelters built by UNRWA in 61 refugee camps scattered in the occupied territory and the Arab host countries. The biggest number of refugees live in Jordan. Since 1952 the refugees living there and their descendants have been eligible for Jordanian citizenship and entitled to all government services.



In Lebanon, Palestine refugees without Lebanese nationality require work permits in order to be employed. Since the outbreak of civil war in 1975 the refugees, like the Lebanese, have suffered from violence, invasion and political turmoil. Many camps and shelters have been repeatedly damaged, causing a heavy toll of casualties and displacing thousands of families. In Syria, Palestine refugees have the same rights as Syrian citizens, except for the right to vote.

In the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Palestine refugees since 1967 have lived under Israeli occupation. They have suffered from increasing economic hardship, legal and political restrictions and from harsh measures applied by the Israeli military and civil authorities. Since the outbreak of the Palestinian uprising (intifada) in 1987 hundreds of Palestinians have been killed and tens of thousands injured, arrested or detained.



UNRWA area of operations

Not to be considered an authority on the delineation
of international boundaries

REFUGEES REGISTERED WITH UNRWA
30. 6. 1991

FIELD	IN CAMPS	NOT IN CAMPS	TOTAL
Jordan	227,719	732,493	960,212
West Bank	114,763	315,320	430,083
Gaza	288,582	240,102	528,684
Lebanon	157,977	152,608	310,585
S. A. R.	84,972	204,951	289,923
TOTAL ALL FIELDS	874,013	1,645,474	2,519,487

The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the General Assembly in December 1949. UNRWA was created as a temporary relief organization without prejudice to the rights of the refugees to repatriation or compensation. UNRWA started its operations in May 1950 providing mainly food, shelter, clothing and basic medical care to the refugees. Pending a just settlement of the Palestine problem, the General Assembly has repeatedly extended the Agency's mandate since then. UNRWA has gradually adjusted its programmes to meet the changing needs of the refugees.

Today UNRWA runs regular education, health, relief and social services for over two and a half million refugges. UNRWA's humanitarian role was reinforced during recent upheavals in Lebanon and the occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip where the Agency has had to undertake emergency measures to alleviate the plight of refugees suffering from chronic violence and hardship.

UNRWA's headquarters were in Beirut, Lebanon, from 1950–78. Due to unstable conditions in Lebanon, they were moved to Vienna, Austria and Amman, Jordan, pending an eventual return. Headquarters supervises the operations of five Field offices in the Near East – in Beirut, Damascus, Amman, Jerusalem and Gaza.

UNRWA IN FIGURES	JORDAN	GAZA STRIP	WEST BANK	LEBANON	SYRIAN ARAB REPUBLIC	TOTAL
Percentage of total refugees	36%	20%	17%	13%	12%	100%
Camps	10	8	20	13	10	61
Percentage of refugees in camps	24%	55%	27%	51%	29%	35% average
Refugees on special hardship assistance	31,176	50,049	29,455	35,680	15,676	162,013
Health centres, points	18	9	33	22	22	104
UNRWA schools	196	150	98	77	111	632
UNRWA school-children 89/90	136,510	97,238	40,612	34,098	57,217	365,625
Student VTC places 89/90	1,468	712	1,570	624	772	5,146
Students on UNRWA university scholarships	152	163	113	67	146	641
UNRWA staff	5,657	4,403	2,863	2,432	2,685	18,339

REGULAR PROGRAMMES

Education

UNWRA's biggest regular programme is education. The Agency runs 632 elementary and junior secondary schools for some 365,000 pupils, 8 vocational and teacher training centres with places for more than 5,100 students and provides 641 university scholarships a year for refugees.

Health

UNRWA offers a basic health service from 104 health centres, receiving nearly six million patient visits annually. The Agency concentrates on preventive medicine and mother and child care. It strives to improve drinking water and sewerage systems in the refugee camps.

Relief and Social Services

UNRWA relief and social services programme provides food, clothing and some cash assistance to about 162,000 particularly needy refugees registered as special hardship cases.

At the same time, the Agency promotes self-sufficiency among the refugees through small-scale income-generating projects. The Agency's welfare services include youth and women's activities centres in the refugee camps and centres for the disabled. Damaged refugee shelters and UNRWA premises – schools, clinics, distribution centres – require constant rehabilitation and maintenance.

EMERGENCY MEASURES

In Lebanon and in the occupied territory of the West Bank and Gaza Strip UNRWA's emergency measures include:

- expansion of the special hardship programme
- distribution of food rations to needy refugee families
- distribution of cash assistance to refugee families who are in need, displaced or whose shelters have been demolished or sealed
- provision of expanded emergency medical services
- introduction of a general assistance programme with extra international staff whose task is to facilitate Agency operations and provide a measure of general protection to the refugees.

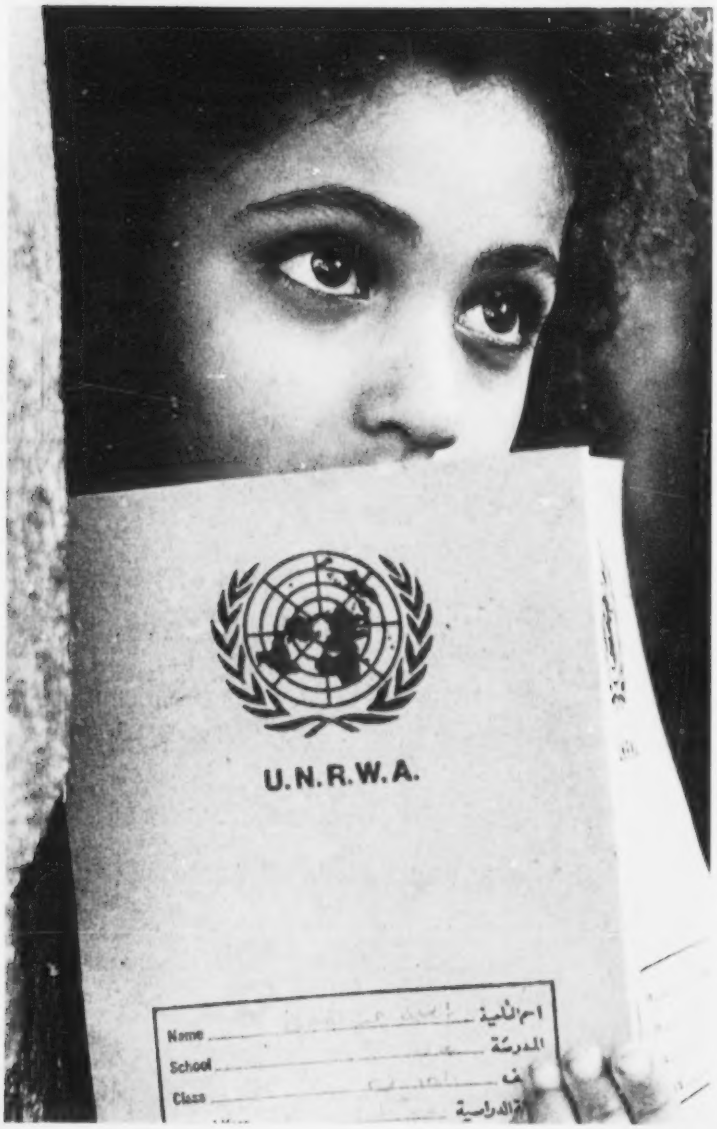
How is UNRWA financed?

UNRWA relies entirely on voluntary contributions from governments and international organizations to fund its regular budget ($ 254 million in 1991) and emergency programmes ($ 44,1 million in 1991).
UNRWA needs to increase its budget by 5% annually just to keep up with population growth and inflation. Additional funds are needed to construct new schools, improve health facilities and expand self-sufficiency projects for the refugees. Despite its vital role, UNRWA's finances are frequently overstretched and contributions seldom keep pace with the increasing demands.

Who are UNRWA's staff?

UNRWA's staff of some 18,000, including about 11,000 teachers, are 99 per cent Palestine refugees themselves. Only 141 employees are international staff members recruited from 27 countries. A number of the Agency's senior education and health staff are on loan from UNESCO and WHO.
UNRWA's current Commissioner-General, Ilter Türkmen of Turkey, took up his duties on 4 March 1991.

UNRWA...



Published by the Public Information Office
UNRWA Headquarters (Vienna)
Vienna International Centre
P. O. Box 700, A-1400 Vienna
Austria